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TITLE: Automated sampling methods for rapid  
characterization of polymers

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PARENT-CASE:

This application claims priority under 35 U.S.C. Sec. 119(e) to U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 60/080,652, filed Apr. 3, 1998 by Safir et al., which is hereby incorporated by reference for all purposes. This application is related to following U.S. patent applications filed on the date even herewith, each of which is hereby incorporated by reference for all purposes: Ser. No. 09/285,393, entitled "Rapid Characterization of Polymers", filed Apr. 2, 1999 by Safir et al. under; Ser. No. 09/285,333, entitled "High-Temperature Characterization of Polymers", filed Apr. 2, 1999 by Petro et al. under; Ser. No. 09/285,335, entitled "Flow-Injection Analysis and Variable-Flow Light Scattering Apparatus and Methods for Characterizing Polymers", filed Apr. 2, 1999 by Nielsen et al. under; and Ser. No. 09/285,392, entitled "Indirect Calibration of Polymer Characterization Systems", filed Apr. 2, 1999 by Petro et al. under.

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Brief Summary Text - BSTX:

Liquid chromatography is well known in the art for characterizing a polymer sample. Liquid chromatographic techniques employ separation of one or more components of a polymer sample from other components thereof by flow through a chromatographic column, followed by detection of the separated components with a flow-through detector. Approaches for liquid chromatography can vary, however, with respect to the basis of separation and with respect to the basis of detection. Gel permeation chromatography (GPC), a well-known form of size exclusion chromatography (SEC), is a frequently-employed chromatographic technique for polymer size determination. In GPC, the polymer sample is separated into components according to the hydrodynamic volume occupied by each component in solution. More specifically, a polymer sample is injected into a mobile phase of a liquid chromatography system and is passed through one or more chromatographic columns packed with porous beads. Molecules with relatively small hydrodynamic volumes diffuse into the pores of the beads and remain therein for longer periods, and therefore exit the column after molecules with relatively larger hydrodynamic volume. Hence, GPC can characterize one or more separated components of the polymer sample with respect to its effective hydrodynamic radius ( $R_{sub.h}$ ). Another chromatographic separation approach is illustrated by U.S. Pat. No. 5,334,310 to Frechet et al. and involves the use of a porous monolithic stationary-phase as a separation medium within the chromatographic column, combined with a mobile-phase composition gradient. (See also, Petro et al, Molded Monolithic Rod of Macroporous Poly(styrene-co-divinylbenzene) as a

Separation Medium for  
 HPLC Synthetic Polymers: "On-Column"  
 Precipitation-Redissolution Chromatography  
 as an Alternative to Size Exclusion Chromatography of  
 Styrene Oligomers and  
 Polymers, Anal. Chem., 68, 315-321 (1996); and Petro et al,  
 Immobilization of  
 Trypsin onto "Molded" Macroporous Poly (Glycidyl  
 Methacrylate-co-Ethylene  
 Dimethacrylate) Rods and Use of the Conjugates as  
 Bioreactors and for Affinity  
 Chromatography, Biotechnology and Bioengineering, Vol. 49,  
 pp. 355-363  
 (1996)). Chromatography involving the porous monolith is  
 reportedly based on a  
 precipitation/redissolution phenomenon that separates the  
 polymer according to  
 size--with the precipitated polymer molecules selectively  
 redissolving as the  
 solvent composition is varied. The monolith provides the  
 surface area and  
 permeation properties needed for proper separation. Other  
 separation  
 approaches are also known in the art, including for  
 example, normal-phase  
 adsorption chromatography (with separation of polymer  
 components being based on  
 preferential adsorption between interactive functionalities  
 of repeating units  
 and an adsorbing stationary-phase) and reverse-phase  
 chromatography (with  
 separation of polymer components being based on hydrophobic  
 interactions  
 between a polymer and a non-polar stationary-phase). After  
 separation, a  
 detector can measure a property of the polymer or of a  
 polymer component--from  
 which one or more characterizing properties, such as  
 molecular weight can be  
 determined as a function of time. Specifically, a number  
 of molecular-weight  
 related parameters can be determined, including for  
 example: the weight-average  
 molecular weight ( $M_{sub.w}$ ), the number-average molecular  
 weight ( $M_{sub.n}$ ), the  
 molecular-weight distribution shape, and an index of the  
 breadth of the  
 molecular-weight distribution ( $M_{sub.w} / M_{sub.n}$ ), known as

the polydispersity  
index (PDI). Other characterizing properties, such as  
mass, particle size,  
composition or conversion can likewise be determined.